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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 001222

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [RU](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: RUSSIA THREATENS MILITARY ACTION AFTER  
SOLIDER DEFECTS

REF: A. A) TBILISI 0148

[1](#)B. B) RUSSELL-BEYRL-TEFFT TELCON

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT, REASON: 1.4 (B.D)

[1](#)1. (U) This is an action request, please see paragraph 8.

[1](#)2. (C) Summary: A Russian solider crossed into undisputed Georgian territory near Perevi on July 1. He hid in the home of a local resident until the MOIA took custody of him at approximately 2200 on July 1 when he requested asylum. Early on July 2, the Georgian Government alerted us to the asylum request, and informed us that the Russian unit commander in Perevi had threatened to attack undisputed Georgian territory if the solider was not returned in four hours. EUMM confirmed the threat, and reported the movement of several BMPs and troops up to the checkpoint at Perevi. MOIA confirmed that four BMPs and 30 soldiers had moved to the checkpoint. The soldier was transferred to Tbilisi and after coordination with the US, EUMM and UNHCR, the soldier was interviewed by UNHCR and determined to be a qualified asylum seeker. The UNHCR has officially requested the GOG to apply the Geneva Convention in this case. The GOG is hopeful that UNHCR will act quickly to issue travel papers for the solider and move him to a third country. End Summary.

[1](#)3. (C) On July 2 Georgian Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Eka Zguladze call the Ambassador to inform him that a Russian soldier had crossed into undisputed Georgian territory at Perevi and requested asylum. The solider, reported in the media as Dmitri Artemiev, escaped into Georgia on July 1 and hid at the home of a local resident until he requested asylum from the MOIA at 2200. On the morning of July 2, the local Russian commander reportedly told the Georgians that if the soldier was not returned within 4 hours, Russia would attack Georgia. Zguladze asked for our urgent advice. She said Georgia wanted to do the right thing on a humanitarian basis. Because of Georgia's international legal obligations they could not return the solider, but they also did not want a blowup with Russia. The Ambassador suggested that the GOG contact UNHCR and ask that they facilitate the asylum request in order to move the discussion from a bilateral to an international level. The Ambassador passed the same message to National Security Advisor Eka Tkeshelashvili. The GOG welcomed the suggestion and said they would contact UNHCR immediately.

[1](#)4. (C) Post then contacted the local head of UNHCR Peter Nicolaus and informed him of the situation. UNHCR staff, with UNHCR HQ approval, interviewed Artemiev at the UNHCR Tbilisi office together with Georgian Ministry of Refugees and Accommodations (MRA) officials. UNHCR spoke with the solider and informed him of his rights and the steps for protection available through the GOG process. With the agreement of the MOIA and MRA, Artemiev was moved to the MRA reception center for asylum seekers in Tbilisi.

[1](#)5. (C) EUMM chief Hansjoerg Haber informed the Ambassador

that EUMM had activated its hotline with the Russian military in South Ossetia and advised the Russians to pull back the BMP tanks and soldiers that they had advanced to the checkpoint. Haber supported the idea of asking UNHCR to be a primary actor in this case. Later in the day, Haber confirmed that Artemiev appeared to have suffered from recent beatings.

EUMM Deputy Janvier went to the ABL to meet with Tarasov.

No report of this meeting has yet emerged.

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¶6. (C) Following Embassy Moscow's discussions with the Russian MFA (following ref B), the MOIA reported that Russian forces and BMPs moved away from the checkpoint and back into Perevi. The situation appears to have stabilized. The Russian soldier remains in the custody of the Georgian Ministry for Refugees and Accommodations, who is working with UNHCR and ICRC in hopes of find a way to provide third country settlement for the soldier.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: We understand Artemiev was fully aware of the early defection of the Russian soldier Glukhov, and that Glukhov now lives in Georgia (reftel). In an interview with the press, he lamented the poor conditions and beatings that Artemiev faced in the military. Given the treatment of Russian conscripts and the porousness of the South Ossetian administrative boundary, post fears that we will see more defections. The international community together with the Georgians need to develop a system for dealing with these types of case to ensure that they do not become a pretext for Russian military action.

¶8. (C) ACTION REQUEST: Post requests that the Department work with UNHCR, ICRC and our European counterparts to

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establish a system for dealing with potential future Russian military defections in order to stem potential violence.

TEFFT